

# Dioxin, other waste dumping explored

**LAYING WASTE:** The Poisoning of America by Toxic Chemicals, by Michael Brown; Pantheon Books, New York City, \$11.95.

By MICHAEL KELLEY

It is only in recent months that the American public has awakened to the ecological horror story that is in the country's hazardous waste dumps.

This is the nation's biggest environmental problem, and 1980 is the year historians will mark as the time when the public first began to grasp its significance and the Environmental Protection Agency moved to address the problem with implementation of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

Practically every region of the country has been affected.

Niagara Falls is still contending with Love Canal and the nearby Bloody Run, a creek which once ran crimson with the blood of Indian fighters, more recently with the hues

of toxic waste discharges.

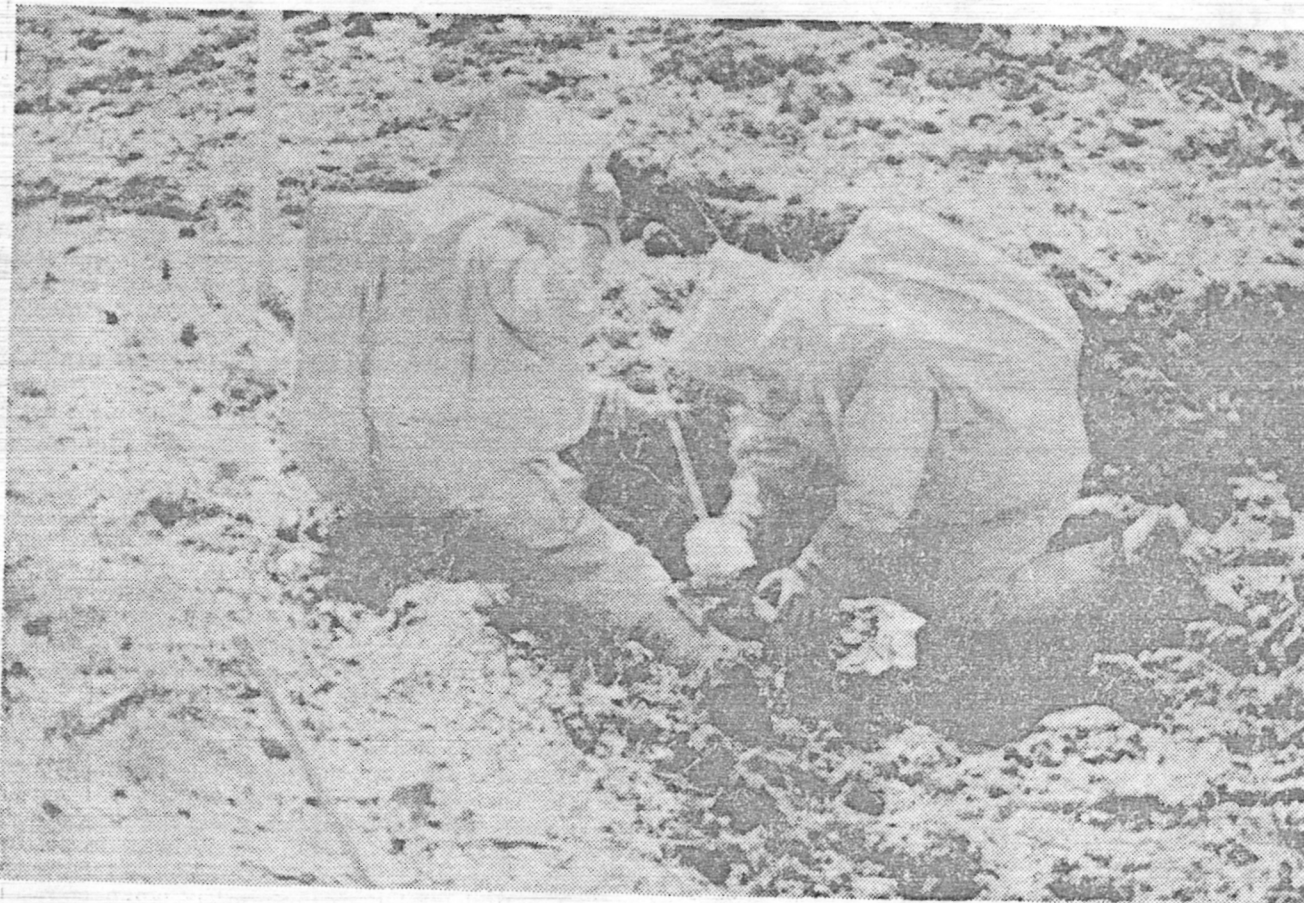
In Southwest Missouri, we have the buried wastes of Northeast Pharmaceutical and Chemical Co. in the Aurora city dump, the James Denney farm in Barry County and the Verona plant site itself.

It was only last week that Denney's neighbors got the unsettling news — wastes buried there between 11 and eight years ago contain the deadly tetra dioxin in concentrations ranging from 1.39 parts per billion to 110 parts per million.

So far, there is no evidence that the powerfully toxic chemical is leaching into any water supplies, but at least one family has already made plans to move out, giving up the farm it has been paying for on a GI loan.

The pioneering journalist in this field is Michael Brown, a staffer for the Niagara Gazette who fought resistance from Hooker Chemical Co., local politicians, state health officials and his own skeptical publisher to expose the magnitude of Love Canal, the abandoned Hooker dump that so contaminated a neighborhood there were signs warning motorists to watch for deaf children playing in the streets.

Brown's account of the unfolding of the Love Canal story is Part I, "The Legacy of the Hooker Chemical Co." In Part II, "Toxic America," and Part III, "Losing Control," he takes us to the swamps of Louisiana, the plains of Texas, the mountains of California, the cesspool that is New Jersey, and elsewhere, showing us that there is practically nowhere to escape from this problem — it's time to start cleaning up.



Workers wearing protective suits dig for barrels containing the poisonous dioxin on a

farm near Aurora. Dioxin is among a number of chemicals dumped across the U.S.



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SUPERFUND RECORDS

182

11/1/80

Site:	Syntex Verona
ID#	MOD007452154
Break:	13.3
Other:	0751
	6/1/80

JK

292

Brown interviews the victims, the regulators, the dumpers. He traces the leaching of PCBs, benzene, mercury, heptachlor, dieldrin and other carcinogenic products and by-products into dozens of water systems across the country. He gives the anecdotal evidence as well as the statistics that point to a striking conclusion: Much like the atomic energy industry, there is a segment of the chemical industry that has developed its products with its eyes on today's profits, its back to the health of future generations.

He devotes a page of his toxic waste history to Missouri's most publicized

toxic waste incident, Russell Bliss's transfer of dioxin-laden sludge from NEPACCO's abandoned still-bottoms tank at the Syntex Agribusiness plant in Verona to the St. Louis area horse-breeding farm of Judy Piatt, where it was used in a spray to control dust. More than 60 horses died and some children became ill as a result.

In one chapter, Brown shows how the bureaucracy is apt to respond to the problem, describing the report of New York State Health Department researchers in which complex formulas are used to affix a value to human life: "\$29,226 to \$1-million with most values between \$200,000 and \$300,000." The report concluded that whenever trichloroethylene was greater than 50

parts per billion in drinking water, based on a risk of one extra death in a population of 100,000 and an assumed economic life value of \$500,000, it would be worthwhile to install aeration treatment to decrease contaminant levels in a system serving 10 million gallons a day, but that "treatment of smaller systems cannot be justified based on these data." So much for people on small water systems.

Brown holds out some hope that technology, which created this monster, can also destroy it. "A major research effort must be instituted, by government and industry, so that in the end toxicants will have been

pulled apart and returned to the environment as simple, benign molecules." Then he goes on to say that it might be best to minimize production of such substances in the first place, "...until industry, so slow to protect our needs, has demonstrated ways of destroying their wastes, or of making them innocuous to all segments of the ecology."

The earth's resources are finite, he points out. We ought to stop spoiling our nest.